

Committee on Government Reform

Tom Davis, Chairman



MEDIA ADVISORY

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Government Reform Committee to Review Proposed Transformation of Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

Helping HHS Meet 21st Century Challenges and Threats

**What: COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM OVERSIGHT HEARING
“Serving the Underserved in the 21st Century: The Need for a Stronger, More
Responsive Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.”**

When: Thursday, October 30, 2003, 10:00 a.m.

Where: Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

The purpose of the hearing will be to examine the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) proposed transformation of the U.S. Public Health Service’s Commissioned Corps (PHS Commissioned Corps).

The PHS Commissioned Corps, one of the seven uniformed services of the United States, is comprised of highly-trained and mobile health professionals who carry out programs to promote good health, understand and prevent disease and injury, assure safe and effective drugs and medical devices, deliver health services to Federal beneficiaries, and supply health expertise in time of war or other national or international emergencies. Corps officers have been providing health care to American citizens for over 200 years and are constantly adapting to changing demands and new challenges in the public health field. However, currently, the PHS Commissioned Corps is underutilized and underdeveloped. As a result of this, HHS intends to strengthen the public health infrastructure by transforming the Corps to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The rationale behind the proposed transformation is deep-rooted in new emerging threats facing our country. As the U.S. continues to face uncertain threats, including possible terrorist attacks and infectious diseases, it is critical that the Secretary has well

trained medical professionals who can respond immediately and appropriately to an emergency need.

This hearing will focus on the HHS proposed improvements to make the PHS Commissioned Corps a more readily deployable force to respond quickly and effectively to emergency health needs around the country.

There are three main principles guiding the transformation proposal. The first is to expand and enhance the PHS Commissioned Corps. The second initiative aims to improve and expand training and deployability of PHS officers to areas where primary care services are lacking. The third initiative will improve the PHS Commissioned Corps' management and development structure.

Under the proposal, the PHS Commissioned Corps' size, structure, and response capabilities will evolve into a more accessible team of healthcare and public health professionals. The Corps will remain committed to traditional public health needs, including providing healthcare to underserved areas around the country, supporting the expansion of community health centers, and strengthening the health care safety net for all Americans. These functions will be balanced with emergency response efforts to create a better-equipped and more effective PHS Commissioned Corps.

WITNESSES

Panel One

Vice Admiral Richard H. Carmona, U.S. Surgeon General

Panel Two

Dr. C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General

Dr. Julius Benjamin Richmond, former U.S. Surgeon General

Dr. Edward N. Brandt, Jr., former Assistant Secretary for Health

Captain Jerry Farrell, Executive Director, Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

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